

Terrestrial Plant Communities

The maintained-disturbed community type accounts for the majority of the vegetative cover in all of the alternate corridors. The dry-mesic oak hickory forest is the next most abundant community type within the study area. Piedmont/low mountain alluvial forest communities are represented least within the study area.

Terrestrial Wildlife

Most of the project area is rural in character with scattered residential and small commercial developments. Large forested areas are still present near the project study area, but are limited primarily to lands immediately adjacent to the larger streams. Clearing and conversion of land for highways, railroads, agricultural, timberland, commercial, and residential uses has eliminated cover and protection for many species of wildlife, but has increased habitat for others that are able to utilize these anthropogenic habitats. There is little habitat for interior species, but woodland strips bordering small tributaries often serve as travel corridors between habitat types. Agricultural fields and residential areas not only provide food for wildlife, but also create edge habitat favored by many species.

Any of the project alternatives would impact area wildlife. Due to the existing amount of urban development in the project area, wildlife habitat is fragmented. The new location alternatives and the portion of Alternative 1 on new location would add further fragmentation to the area. Wildlife expected to occur in the project area are generally acclimated to fragmented landscapes in this area. However, fragmentation and loss of forested habitat may impact other wildlife in the area by reducing potential nesting and foraging areas, as well as displacing animal populations.

Aquatic Communities

Aquatic habitats within the project study area range from ephemeral waters to intermittent streams, to permanent riverine habitat. The diversity of streams within the project study area provide habitat for a variety of aquatic species.

Resident aquatic species may be temporarily displaced during construction. Water resource impacts may also result from the physical disturbance of the forested stream buffers that adjoin most of the streams within the study area. Removing streamside vegetation can cause elevated water temperatures, cause an increase in sedimentation and turbidity, and ultimately lower the species diversity in the stream. Measures to maximize sediment and erosion control during construction would protect water quality for aquatic organisms.

Jurisdictional Issues

Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA) requires regulation of discharges into “Waters of the United States.” Although the principal administrative agency of the CWA is the US